

# Geoists in History

## Patrick Edward Dove (1815-1873) *by Karl Williams*

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*"So long as the aristocracy have all the land, and derive the rent of it, the labourer is only a serf, and a serf he will remain until he has uprooted the rights of private landed property. The land is for the nation, and not for the aristocracy."*

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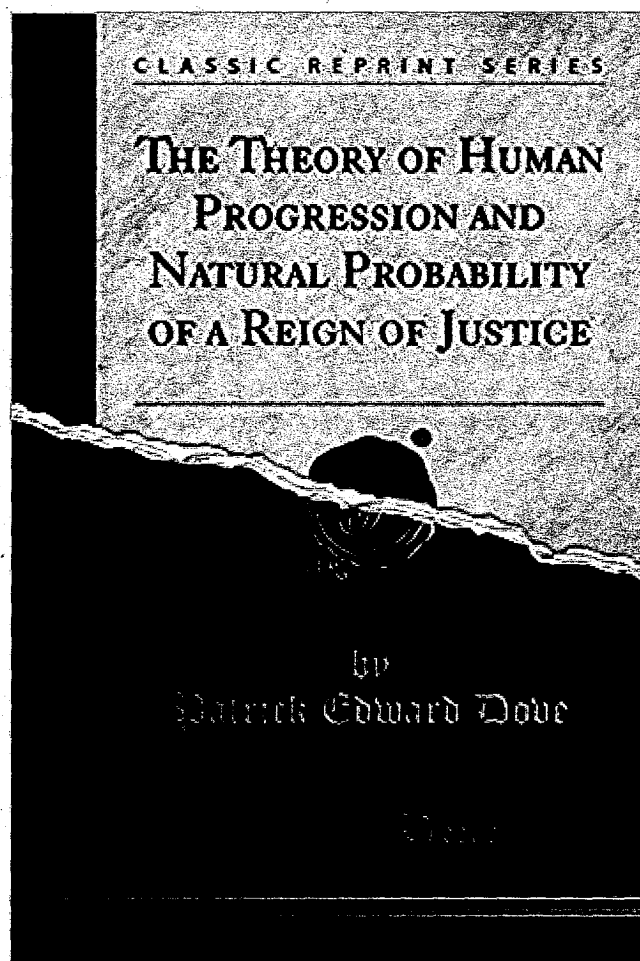
Henry George was not, of course, the originator of the economic sanity that some call Georgism, as one can trace these principles as far back as biblical prophets. Here we'll hear the fascinating tale of one of the greatest precursors to Henry George, Patrick Dove. But lean forward, dear reader, while I whisper a scandalous allegation ..... it is said by some that HG might have plagiarized some of "his" greatest concepts from Dove - horror of horrors!

Patrick Edward Dove was born near Edinburgh into a family of distinguished Scottish clergymen, naval commanders and landowners. He stood out as a boy for his enormous energy, both physical and mental, and right from the start it seemed he was cut out for something very different from the typical privileged life of the lounging, loafing aristocrat for which he was being groomed.

For starters, Dove was disinterested in his formal education even though he was schooled in London, Spain and Paris. A revolutionary right from the get-go, he was shockingly expelled from the French Academy for leading his fellow students in an open insurrection against his tutors.

If Dove's restless energies were turned to the usual aristocratic role of defending their class privileges then the world would then have lost one of its great modern thinkers. Fortunately, he was able to break out of his aristocratic mould.

Still undecided as to his life's direction, from his mid-twenties to early thirties he took to the land and managed the extensive family property in south-west Scotland. But the life of a gentleman farmer entailed riding, shooting, fishing and sailing and Dove knew such an existence would be comfortable but an utter waste of his



talents. Here Fate intervened in the form of the collapse of an investment that lost him most of his fortune. Thus, with his newly-married (and penniless) wife in tow, he shook things up and moved to Darmstadt, south of Frankfurt, where he reignited his voracious intellect by reading, writing and lecturing in a variety of philosophical endeavours.

Here in Germany and at the tender age of 35 was published the first of his mighty works, "The Theory of Human Progression", the opening part of a projected 3-part treatise on the so-called science of politics. It made a great impact on the intellectual class of the day in Britain and North America but never really grabbed the general public. In this work Dove sets out his philosophy that land should be in common ownership, with the economic rent on the land taking the place of other taxes. We'd call it Georgism 101.

After 5 years in Germany, he settled in Edinburgh in 1853 and then, in another five years, moved to Glasgow where he lectured at the highly-regarded Philosophical Institution and continued to write on philosophy, science and the arts.

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*"Private rent is historically misappropriated public taxation"*

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Let's put a bookmark here and examine Dove's evolution as a geoist which began to develop rapidly back when he was managing the family estate in south-west Scotland. To one with a sense of justice, the life of a landless peasant contrasted bitterly to that of the landed aristocracy, all due to the latter's claim to the ownership of the land. And no man ever created land himself!

Dove was said to be the most popular landlord in Scotland because this landlord did not believe in landlords! He maintained that the soil of a nation was the inheritance of its entire people and Dove was never weary of repeating that rent should go to the State for the benefit of all.

Also, he did not believe in the wretched game laws. He had no gamekeeper on his great estate and no "poacher" was ever interfered with or arrested. Another peculiarity was his friendship for Ireland as he stood up stoutly for the Irish peasantry and denounced Britain's treatment of it. During the potato famine he put his energies into providing work for his starving neighbours and acted as agricultural advisor to neighbouring farmers, many of whom took the game they needed from Dove's estate. Class traitors don't get much worse than Patrick Dove.

Dove's actions were mirrored in his writings. A generation before Henry George, Dove declared the invalidity of titles to land founded on the gifts of kings, and on war and despoliation of any kind. He damned the enclosures of the commons in Great Britain and exposed the outrages of Britain's land ownership by tracing the changes from the feudal form of land tenure to the present system. He exposed the origin of poor laws and national debts to be the monopolization of the land. He condemned the injury of indirect taxes to the poor and declared that equality before the law includes natural rights to natural resources. He maintained that the only just theory of

property is that by which the labourer is given the full fruits of his toil. He drew a clear distinction between property in land and property in the products of industry, and he showed that social improvements result in increase of rent. He held that the attainment of full political rights must be followed by that of property rights, and he pointed out the insufficiency of every remedy for poverty save the tax on land values.

It was in 1856 that the second volume of 'The Theory of Human Progression' was written, but tragically the third was never printed and the manuscript was lost. Who was the dastardly villain who nicked it? The second volume employed the theological angle of its day, seeing the land as a gift of the Creator to all men, which should therefore be common rather than private property. As Dove put it, dividing the land into equal shares would be impractical, so the rent of land should be shared in common, effectively replacing all other taxes.

So what was the reaction to 'The Theory of Human Progression'? While many luminaries read it and strongly endorsed it, it basically bypassed the masses. On the positive side, the book was praised by Thomas Carlyle as the voice of a new revolution in education and economics, and the philosopher Sir William Hamilton spoke of it rallying mankind to great reforms. Charles Sumner had copies made and circulated them in the United States, subsequently persuading Dove to write an article opposing slavery titled 'The Elder and Younger Brother' which appeared in the *Boston Commonwealth* in September 1853.

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*"Place one hundred men on an island from which there is no escape, and whether you make one of these men the absolute owner of the other ninety-nine, or the absolute owner of the soil of the island, will make no difference either to him or to them."*

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Despite such praise the book was not a popular success, though some scholarly interest continued. To put it plainly, Dove was soon forgotten. An ember remained and faintly glowed again when in 1884 Henry George praised the book at a public meeting in Glasgow, and George made reference to Dove in 'A Perplexed Philosopher', Part I, Chapter VI. But exactly how much HG

had read and borrowed from Dove is something that we'll never know in this world. Even amongst geoists today, very few have heard of Dove. OK, we have HG's elaborate and masterful works which have omitted nothing of great importance, but Dove himself has not received a tiny fraction of the credit he deserves. And perhaps HG's amazing works wouldn't be quite so amazing had not HG read Dove.

The remainder of Dove's life seems trivial by comparison. He lectured on a wide range of historical subjects, edited Glasgow's *Commonwealth* newspaper, and was involved in the arts and sciences on many fronts. His broad education and research led him to edit the *Imperial Dictionary of Biography* as well as writing for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. His interest in engineering led him to invent a rifle with exceptional range and accuracy. He wrote on Christianity, military science, agriculture and more philosophy.

But all these other intellectual pursuits are but hobbies and trifles compared to the monumental

economic intellectual advances Dove had made. For reasons we'll never really fathom, the world had turned its disinterested back on Dove.

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*"The allocation of the rents of the soil to the nation is the only possible means by which a just distribution of the created wealth can be effected."*

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If you don't like unhappy endings, then skip this last paragraph. With Dove sitting on the key to economic sanity about which the world seemingly cared little, it's perhaps not surprising that something had to give. So in 1860, when Dove was barely 45, he suffered a stroke which left him partly paralysed as well as mentally affected. He lingered on as a shadow of his former self for thirteen years before finally dying from a series of brain haemorrhages.

Next issue: number 67, the real inventor of 'Monopoly', Elizabeth Phillips

